



# Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy Frequently Asked Questions

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## 1. What is the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy?

The Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy is an award provided by state-approved public schools and districts that recognizes high school graduates who attain high functional and academic levels of proficiency in English and one or more other world languages by high school graduation. The State Seal of Biliteracy takes the form of an insignia that appears on the transcript and/or diploma of the graduate.

## 2. What is the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction?

The State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction recognizes students who have exceeded the minimum requirements for the State Seal of Biliteracy.



3. How many districts are enrolled in the State Seal of Biliteracy program?

There are currently 176 districts participating in the State Seal of Biliteracy. [A map of participating districts may be accessed here.](#)

4. How many students have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction so far?

As of July 2021, districts have reported awarding the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction to 4,552 students.

5. What are the requirements for a district to award the State Seal of Biliteracy?

Participation in the State Seal of Biliteracy is **voluntary** for districts. Districts that wish to participate should:

- Read the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy Guidance (available on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#));
- Enroll in the State Seal of Biliteracy program in WBMS in the Department's Security Portal;
- Annually provide written notification about the State Seal of Biliteracy to parents or legal guardians;
- Administer or facilitate world language assessments to students and families that indicate interest and ensure that low-income students (as described in [G.L. c. 70 § 2](#)) have access to any assessment necessary to qualify for the State Seal of Biliteracy;
- Affix the unaltered state insignia on the diploma, or the transcript, or both, of students who meet the requirements listed in this document;
- Maintain a record of all students who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction and the assessment results used to substantiate the student's biliteracy; and
- Annually report the names of all students who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction on the end-of-year SIMS report.

6. How do I access WBMS in the Security Portal to enroll?

The district's [data collection directory administrator](#) must provide the individual overseeing the State Seal of Biliteracy with the role of *WBMS-District Authorizer*. Once the individual with that role logs into the Security Portal, they should view their Applications List and click on *PQA Web Monitoring*, then *LOOK Act*, then *Seal of Biliteracy*. More information about enrollment may be found on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#).



## 7. What are the criteria for a student to earn the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction?

The criteria for earning the State Seal of Biliteracy can be found in [603 CMR 31.07\(2\)](#) of the state regulations.

State Seal of Biliteracy	State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction
Meet all graduation requirements	Meet all graduation requirements
472 or higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest <sup>1</sup>	501 or higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest
A score equivalent to or higher than Intermediate High on a Department-approved world language assessment	A score equivalent to or higher than Advanced Low on a Department-approved world language assessment

## 8. How does a student satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy?

The law establishes that students must take and earn minimum scores on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest to earn the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. A minimum score of 472 satisfies the English criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy, and a minimum score of 501 for the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. Students who score between 455 and 471 retest may still satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy if they fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan and attain a minimum score or level on a nationally recognized and readily available English proficiency assessment approved by the Department, such as ACCESS for ELLs .

## 9. How does a student satisfy the world language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy?

The Department approves nationally recognized world language assessments and identifies minimum for the purpose of satisfying the criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. See the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#) to view assessments available for each language, contact information for the assessment's vendor, and the minimum score necessary to satisfy the criteria for the Seal of Biliteracy and the Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who earn a scaled score between 455 and 471 on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest may still satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy if they fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan and attain a minimum score or level on a nationally recognized and readily available English proficiency assessment approved by the Department, such as ACCESS for ELLs.



10. Do students need to be enrolled in world, heritage, or dual language programs to earn the State Seal of Biliteracy?

No. The State Seal of Biliteracy only reflects a student's communicative skills and should not be used to reflect course or program enrollment or completion.

11. Can the district award the State Seal of Biliteracy in languages that are not offered in the district?

Yes. Districts that award the State Seal of Biliteracy should provide the Seal equitably for all human languages in which a student wishes to demonstrate proficiency.

12. Which students should be offered a world language assessment for the State Seal of Biliteracy?

All students in grade 10 or above who indicate interest or whose parent(s)/guardian(s) indicate interest should have the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English. Districts are encouraged to find such interested student and families by recruiting students in world language, heritage language, dual language, and English learner programs, as well as students who have a language other than English listed on their home language surveys.

13. Which world language assessments should my district choose?

The Department assigns assessments to one of four categories based on the availability and scope of the assessment. Those categories are Complete-Domain Assessments, Partial-Domain Assessments, Alternative Assessments, and Additional Assessments.

Assessments must be selected using the following criteria:

1. When a Complete-Domain Assessment is available for a particular language, then a Complete-Domain Assessment must be chosen.
2. If no Complete-Domain Assessment is available, then a Partial-Domain Assessment, if available, must be selected.
3. If no Partial-Domain Assessment is available for the language, then an Alternative Assessment may be selected.
4. Students who require accommodations that Complete-Domain or Partial-Domain assessments cannot provide may also access Alternative Assessments.

14. What are the steps to administer an alternative (portfolio) assessment for a world language?



Alternative (portfolio) assessments should only be administered when no Complete-domain or Partial-domain assessments are approved by the Department for the language in question, or when the student has a disability that no Department-approved Complete or Partial-domain assessment can accommodate. In such cases the district has two options:

- **Vendor-managed portfolio** – Under this option, the district works with the student to select a portfolio rater vendor from the Department’s approved list of portfolio rater services (available on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#)). The selected vendor will make all arrangements for evidence collection with the student and issue a final report to the district.
- **District-managed portfolio** – Under this option, the student and district own the entire portfolio process. The student and the district work together to find a credible authority in the language to collect and review evidence that the student is proficient in the language. The rater uses the Department’s portfolio indicators to describe what a student can do with the language and sends that report to the district. The district interprets the report using the Department’s portfolio score conversion tool and assigns a final proficiency determination to the student.

Under both options, the district is responsible to maintain records and to ensure access to the alternative assessment for students designated as low-income.

#### 15. What if a student has already taken a world language assessment in another setting, district, state, or country?

The scores from any nationally recognized world language assessment approved by the Department are transferrable. Students who have taken language assessments outside of the United States (e.g., students who are recent arrivals to the U.S., students who participated in school or language programs while abroad, etc.) as well as students who have participated in community-based language programs may have had access to a wide variety of proficiency-based assessments that are not readily available to school districts and thus not on the Department-approved list. If such a student has already demonstrated Intermediate High proficiency on such an assessment, the results may satisfy the criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. If students report results from an assessment that is not listed on the Department’s official World Language Assessment list, districts may email [MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov](mailto:MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov) to request a review of the assessment in question.

#### 16. What is the cost of the State Seal of Biliteracy?

There is no direct cost to the district associated with the State Seal of Biliteracy. The Grade 10 ELA MCAS is provided for free to districts to satisfy the English criteria.



Students are responsible to cover the costs associated with the world language assessment, although districts may assume that cost. Districts must ensure that students designated as low-income have access to any assessment required to qualify for the State Seal of Biliteracy at no cost. To do so, districts may use:

- Title IV Part A funds,
- Title I funds,
- MA grant for Proficiency-based Outcomes in Languages other than English, and
- Other state, federal, and local funds districts have access to in order to cover the fees for low-income students.

#### 17. Who maintains the State Seal of Biliteracy records?

It is the responsibility of the school district to maintain all records of students who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction, as well as the world language assessment(s) score report that qualified the student.

#### 18. How does the district award the State Seal of Biliteracy or State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction insignias to students?

The electronic insignias for the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction are available for download on WBMS in the Security Portal. Districts may transfer the insignias directly onto diplomas and/or transcripts, or they may procure stickers, certificates, pins, medals, and/or other awards using the electronic image. At minimum, the insignia must appear on either the transcripts or the diploma, or both. Districts should indicate on the transcripts if the student earned the Seal of Biliteracy, the languages in which students earned the Seal, and whether they earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction in each language.

#### 19. How does the district report students who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy to DESE?

Districts indicate whether graduates earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy in the end-of-year SIMS report. Additionally, there is a voluntary data report available on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#). The Department requests that districts provide information in that voluntary report to enable us to gain more complete data.

#### 20. Who should oversee the Seal of Biliteracy administration in the district?

The Department recommends that the district assign someone to the role of Seal of Biliteracy Coordinator. Such positions are most often staffed by a district or high school leader of the English Learner, Heritage Language, Dual Language, or World Language department, or a superintendent, assistant superintendent, or curriculum director.



Districts should list the name of the Seal of Biliteracy Coordinator in the directory on their [School and District Profile](#).

**21. Can a student earn high school credits with a State Seal of Biliteracy?**

While the State Seal of Biliteracy is not tied to high school credits and is not awarded based on course completion requirements, districts may develop policies to award credits in World Language courses based on the results of assessments used to demonstrate competency for the Seal of Biliteracy. See [MassCore](#) FAQ Question 12.

**22. Can a student earn college credits with the State Seal of Biliteracy?**

Yes. All institutions of higher education have different policies for awarding credit for prior learning experiences, but many colleges and universities throughout the Commonwealth are awarding credit or placement options to students who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy. See the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#) for a list of institutions of higher education that are awarding opportunities based on the State Seal of Biliteracy.

**23. Does the State Seal of Biliteracy apply to American Sign Language (ASL), classical languages, and/or non-written languages?**

Yes. All human languages are eligible to be recognized by the State Seal of Biliteracy.

**24. Do the world language requirements for the MA State Seal of Biliteracy align with the 2021 MA World Languages Curriculum Framework?**

The communication standards in the 2021 Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework are aligned to the ACTFL proficiency scale – the same scale to which the State Seal of Biliteracy is aligned. Although the communication standards are aligned, the framework is more holistic, including cultures, comparisons, connections, communities, social justice, and social and emotional development among its practices, while the Seal focuses almost entirely on communication.

**25. Can a student qualify for the State Seal of Biliteracy in multiple languages in addition to English?**

Yes. The district must maintain the score reports for all languages for which the student qualifies for the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. The district should also list all languages in which the student earned the Seal on the student's transcripts.





26. What if a student met another state's Seal of Biliteracy criteria while enrolled in that state?

The Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy cannot be earned by meeting another state's criteria. If the student's former district maintained the student's qualifying scores on a world language assessment that the Department also approves, those scores may be used to satisfy the world language criteria if they meet Massachusetts' minimum threshold. However, students from other states must also take and earn minimum scores on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest and meet all local graduation requirements in order to earn the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

27. What if a student could not take the Grade 10 ELA MCAS due to Covid?

The requirement for the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest is established in the law. The Department is not authorized to make exceptions. Students in the class of 2021 and 2022 should take the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest at their earliest opportunity to ensure eligibility for the Seal. If the legislature makes any temporary adjustments to this law, districts will be notified through email, and that information will be posted on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](#).

28. What if I have a question that is not addressed here?

Please email [MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov](mailto:MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov).